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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000916

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/CE

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TAGS: PREL RS PL

SUBJECT: PUTIN-TUSK MEETING CONCILIATORY BUT AWKWARD

REF: A. WARSAW 879

1B. MOSCOW 2240

1C. WARSAW 911 (NOT ALL)

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN SAINZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)  
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11. (C) SUMMARY. A Polish MFA official described Russian Prime Minister Putin's September 1 visit to Gdansk as generally positive, but added that there were occasional "cumbersome moments," particularly during Tusk's bilateral meeting with Polish PM Tusk. Although Putin told Tusk that the killing of Polish soldiers at Katyn was a crime, his gift to Tusk was a copy of the recently released Russian intelligence book claiming that Poland collaborated with Nazi Germany in the run-up to World War II. Little progress was made on energy issues. The two leaders also avoided discussions about U.S. missile defense plans and broader international issues such as Georgia. END SUMMARY.

HISTORICAL ISSUES DOMINATE BILAT

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12. (C) At a briefing for foreign diplomats on September 3, Jaroslaw Bratkiewicz, the director of the MFA's Eastern Department, characterized PM Tusk's bilateral meeting with Putin as conciliatory, yet laced with awkward and contradictory moments. Both Prime Ministers set the tone when they agreed that historical issues should be moved to the realm of historians, but noted that it is difficult to avoid carrying subjective perceptions into foreign policy. Putin gave a long monologue repeating arguments from his August 31 "letter to the Poles," but added that Stalin was a "despot" and the murder of Polish soldiers at Katyn was a crime.

13. (C) Putin told Tusk he supported moving forward in resolving historical issues, but did not want to appear as if he was being backed into a corner by the Poles. Tusk responded that he foresaw an incremental process in which historical interpretations should not be manipulated to humiliate other nations. Tusk and Putin then agreed to adopt the conclusions of the bilateral commission on difficult historical issues and to establish a joint "house of common history" with sites in Poland and Russia that would further examine these issues. Putin thanked Tusk for his role in revitalizing Russian-Polish relations, but in an ironic twist, he gave Tusk a copy of the recently-released Russian intelligence service book claiming that Poland collaborated with Nazi Germany in the run-up to World War II.

LITTLE PROGRESS ON ENERGY ISSUES

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14. (C) Bratkiewicz commented that Putin did not appear engaged on economic issues and the bilateral meeting did not lead to breakthroughs on energy issues. Instead, Tusk and Putin agreed to continue discussions on Russian gas supplies

to Poland. Tusk also did not rule out Polish participation in Russia's proposed nuclear plant in Kaliningrad, but wanted to learn more about the project.

¶ 15. (C) Bratkiewicz added that during the Polish-Russian lunch event in Gdansk, Polish Deputy Prime Minister Pawlak spoke about the benefits of constructing a second leg of the Yamal gas pipeline. Putin responded that the issue was not completely closed from the Russian perspective.

PUTIN'S MIXED DEMEANOR

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¶ 16. (C) Bratkiewicz described Putin's demeanor as reflecting a mixed bag of emotions. Putin appeared stiff and nervous, but conciliatory when talking to Tusk at the bilateral meeting; he was at ease and cracking jokes during the Polish-Russian lunch event, which mainly focused on historical issues. The Russian Prime Minister limited his contact with Polish President Kaczynski--a strong critic of Putin and Russia--to exchanging bored, and sometimes furtive, glances at the public forum. However, when faced with provocative questions from a Georgian journalist after a press conference, he marched through the crowd and engaged her in a heated exchange while circling around her like "a boxer in a championship match."

COMMENT

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¶ 17. (C) Despite the generally positive results of Putin's visit to Poland, his meeting with Tusk suggests that

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historical issues will continue to complicate the relationship, despite Tusk's progress in separating these topics from pragmatic discussions on economic, scientific, and cultural issues. The run-up to the September 17 anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939 is likely to generate more tensions. The Polish National Security Bureau recently released a report on "Russia's Historical Propaganda in 2004-09," and President Kaczynski is planning a conference on Russia's role in World War II.

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